

**Remarks at the Canberra Boys Grammar  
Valedictory Chapel Service and Dinner  
September 25, 2008**

**Daniel A. Clune  
Deputy Chief of Mission  
U.S. Embassy**

**Thank you, Graham,<sup>1</sup> for that kind introduction.**

**It is a great honor for me to have the opportunity to speak to all of you tonight. It's particularly enjoyable for me because Judy and I are close neighbors, living just down the street on Mugga Way. The house we live in was built in 1928 by the Commonwealth for Sir Henry Sheehan, later Secretary to the Treasury and president of the Royal Canberra Golf Club. One year later, in 1929, this school was established. And from the photos in a book Simon<sup>2</sup> sent me earlier this week, it doesn't look like there was a whole lot in this neighborhood back then other than our house and this school.**

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<sup>1</sup> Graham Matthews, Vice-Chairman, Boys Grammar Board of Directors

<sup>2</sup> Simon Murray, Headmaster

Having raised three children of our own, Judy and I have sat through a number of these commencement ceremonies and know what it feels like to be sitting out there, as opposed to standing up here, so I promise to be brief. I've also heard a lot of advice, in commencement ceremonies and elsewhere, and given out a fair bit of my own to our three daughters (not all of it taken, I might add). What I'd like to do tonight is to pass on to you some of the better advice I've heard over the years.

Making the rounds every graduation season in the U.S. is a column written ten years ago for *The Chicago Tribune* by the journalist Mary Schmich, entitled "Advice, like youth, probably just wasted on the young." It is a series of light-hearted suggestions on how to live a fulfilling life.

**Not all of these suggestions apply to you. For instance, one is:**

**“Do not read beauty magazines. They will only make you feel ugly.”**

**Good advice for our daughters, but probably not for you guys.**

**But let me read to you some of her more relevant suggestions:**

**Do one thing every day that scares you.**

**Don't waste your time on jealousy. Sometimes you're ahead, sometimes you're behind. The race is long and,**

**in the end, it's only with yourself.**

**Remember compliments you receive. Forget the insults.**

**If you succeed in doing this, tell me how.**

**Don't feel guilty if you don't know what you want to do with your life. The most interesting people I know didn't know at 22 what they wanted to do with their lives. Some of the most interesting 40-year-olds I know still don't.**

**Let me interrupt Ms. Schmich here to note that I didn't really know what I wanted to do with my life until I was 36 years old. I attended university, law school and practiced law for 10 years before I joined the Foreign Service and**

**began my present career. Ms Schmich continues:**

**Understand that friends come and go, but with a precious few you should hold on. Work hard to bridge the gaps in geography and lifestyle, because the older you get, the more you need the people who knew you when you were young.**

**Get to know your parents. You never know when they'll be gone for good. Be nice to your siblings. They're your best link to your past and the people most likely to stick with you in the future.**

**I see a few parents and younger siblings out there nodding in agreement.**

**Might I add, not only get to know your family, but also take the time to thank your family. Through their sacrifices you have been afforded the opportunity to attend this school and to receive the very best education. But with this opportunity comes the expectation that you will give something back to the communities that have provided you with this privilege.**

**You are the leaders of tomorrow, and as such, I would like to offer you some advice from two leaders of today, who also happen to be two bosses I've had while working for the State Department: Secretaries of State Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice.**

**Born in New York City to immigrant parents, Colin Powell was educated in New York City public schools, spent 35 years in the U.S. Army, rose to the rank of 4-star General,**

**and served as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff – the highest military position in the U.S. During his time as Secretary of State, he brought many of the leadership lessons he learned during his military career to the State Department.**

**Secretary Powell had a list of “13 Rules of Leadership,” and a separate leadership primer with 17 leadership lessons. I did promise to be brief, so I won’t describe each of them in numbing detail, but I would like to share several with you.**

**The first is "It ain't as bad as you think. It will look better in the morning." Grace under pressure usually means remembering that few things are ever as bad, or as good, as they first appear.**

**The second is: "Being responsible sometimes means ticking people off."**

**Good leadership involves responsibility to the welfare of the group, which means that some people will get angry at your actions and decisions. It's inevitable if you're honorable.**

**Trying to get everyone to like you is a sign of mediocrity:**

**You'll avoid the tough decisions, avoid confronting the people who need to be confronted and rewarding those who deserve it.**

**The third is: "Don't go looking for "No". You don't know what you can get away with until you try."**

**It's easier to get forgiveness than permission. Good leaders don't wait for official blessing to try things out. They're**

**prudent, not reckless. But they also know that, in most organizations, if you ask enough people for permission, you'll inevitably come up against someone who believes his job is to say "no."**

**The fourth rule is don't take action if you have only enough information to give you less than a 40 percent chance of being right, but don't wait until you have enough facts to be 100 percent sure, because by then it is almost always too late.**

**In the end, according to Secretary Powell, "the essence of leadership ...has to be selfless service. It has to be more than you. You have to be willing to put it all on the line."**

**Secretary Rice, like Secretary Powell, is a great success story. An African-American female, born in segregated**

**Birmingham, Alabama, she obtained her master's degree and a Ph.D. in International Studies. She served on the National Security Council of the first President Bush, and was the Provost, the top academic and budget officer, at Stanford University for six years before becoming National Security Adviser in 2001 and Secretary of State in 2005.**

**Only a couple of months ago, Secretary Rice came to Australia for a hometown visit in Perth with your Foreign Minister, Stephen Smith. During the visit, Secretary Rice addressed the students at the all-girls school Mercedes College. These students, like all of you graduating tonight, have been afforded a wonderful education and will become leaders in whatever they choose to do.**

**Secretary Rice spoke to them about her path in life. She told them that she never intended to be Secretary of State.**

**Growing up, she was more interested in playing the piano.**

**She went off to university and studied music for a couple of years before coming to the tough realization that she was not going to be a great piano player.**

**After realizing this, Secretary Rice said she wandered into a class on international politics and fell in love with studying the Soviet Union. This is what led her to graduate school, and eventually to work at the White House on the National Security Council.**

**Reflecting on her own life, Secretary Rice told the students “...don’t try to determine what job you’re going to have when you get out. Try to determine what your passion is.**

**Try to figure out what it is you really love to do...Finding your passion is the most important thing that you can do in the next few years ahead of you.”**

**“Now by finding your passion,” she said, “I mean finding something that makes you want to get up and go and do that everyday. And my passion turned out to be the study of the Soviet Union. Not because I had a drop of Russian blood, I can assure you that – but because I was just interested in it.”**

**“And so,” she continued, “my ... message to you would be that when you find your passion, don’t worry if it ...seems a little odd ..., because there is no reason that a black woman from Birmingham, Alabama should have been interested in the Soviet Union. I just was interested in the Soviet Union. Don’t let anybody define for you what you should be**

**interested in. Your horizons should be limitless at this point. You have to find that special combination of what you're good at doing and what you love to do. And when you find that combination ..., life is going to work out."**

**Like Secretary Rice and many of you graduating today, I am a big sports enthusiast. In concluding I'd like to tell you about a column written by one of my favorite sports writers, Michael Wilbon, who writes for the *Washington Post*. In 2002, Wilbon wrote a column contrasting the growing influence of European basketball players in the National Basketball Association with the lack of white-American born players. Wilbon did not attribute this disparity to superior basketball or athletic skills.**

**Wilbon, who is black, wrote that, “Fifteen years ago when I was still playing pickup basketball, a white kid in upper Northwest Washington was the best ball handling guard in the neighborhood. He probably was one of the best in the city, and he was 13. Suddenly and inexplicably, he stopped showing up to play. I ran into his parents one evening at the grocery store and asked why he had stopped coming to the playground. And his father said, ‘He's just a skinny white kid. Why should he waste his time playing against all those talented black players?’ If ever there was ample evidence that environment can trump genetics, this is it. The notion that "White Men Can't Jump" ought to be changed to "White American Kids Don't Jump Because They've Been Convinced They Shouldn't Try."**

**And here is the important part.**

**Wilbon continued, “It's no different, really, than black kids in American being told, usually by other blacks, that they shouldn't swim, shouldn't try to play hockey, shouldn't -- for that matter -- try to excel in science and technology. Kids try what they're led to believe they'll be comfortable doing. And many mainstream white kids have been made to feel alien in the best basketball laboratories, most of which are dominated by blacks.”**

**The point is that the biggest obstacle between you and achieving your dream is other people, or even yourself, telling you that it is not possible, it is too hard, or that you are not good enough to achieve it.**

**And so, as you leave Canberra Boys Grammar, my advice to you is to find what makes you most passionate, dedicate yourself to something larger than yourself, take chances and, above all, do not let anyone tell you that you cannot succeed.**

**Good night and God bless.**